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ABSTRACT

Home schooling is one form of school choice that is on the increase. During the 1993-94 school year, Connecticut school officials estimated that there were 1,113 home-instructed students in the state, an increase of 305 students from the previous year and a 1,384 percent increase since 1983. This paper presents findings of a case study that explored parents' motivations to home school and the design of their home-school activities. The sample was comprised of four Connecticut families who used home schooling to educate their children. The children's educational levels ranged from preschool through high school, and some children had special needs. Superintendents from the families' school districts, principals, and central-office administrators also participated in the study. Data collection methods included interviews, document analysis, and observation of the home schools. Findings showed that the families used a variety of teaching and assessment methods; home-schooled children behaved like typical children as they were being taught; and principals were more supportive of home schooling than were superintendents and central-office administrators. Principals offered part-time enrollment options for home schooling. The families had decided to home school after learning about it through social networks. The students did not appear to be socially isolated. Because home schooling provides opportunities for flexible curricula and committed parental involvement, the paper advocates building partnerships between school districts and home-school families. (LMI)

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SCHOOL CHOICE: FOUR CASE STUDIES OF HOME SCHOOL FAMILIES IN CONNECTICUT

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ABSTRACT

School Choice: Four Case Studies of Home School Families in Connecticut

Educational choice has become one of the most talked about school reform strategies. One form of school choice that is increasing is home schooling. During the 1993-94 school year, Connecticut school officials were aware of 1,113 home instructed students, a 305 increase from the previous school year and a 1,384% increase since 1983.

This research describes parents' motivations to home school and the design and activities in the home schools. It also describes school officials' attitudes toward home school families and their perceptions of the current policy on home instruction.

Four Connecticut home school families, not previously known to the researcher, participated in the study. Children ranged from grades pre-school through high school and included children with disabilities. Superintendents, from the four families' school districts, principals and central office administrators also participated. Data collection included interviews, documents analysis and direct observations of the home schools.

Three of the major findings included: families used a variety of teaching and assessment methods in their home schools; home schooled children behaved like typical kids as they were being

taught; and principals were more supportive of home schooling than superintendents and central office administrators, including offering part-time enrollment options to home school students.

Implications for future policy decisions are presented such as dual enrollment options and home schooling students with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

Support for educational choice is widespread and has become one of today's most talked about school reform strategies. A 1992 Gallup poll found that 70% of Americans would back a government supported voucher system under which parents could send their children to the public, private, or parochial school of their choice (Lawton, 1992). Government officials, policy makers, school critics, and parents have embraced school choice as a quick solution to the problems facing schools today. Some school reformers believe that if parents could choose which schools their children will attend, education would improve. As reported in School Reform in the United States (1995), more than 20 states have some form of school choice.

Home schooling is another form of school choice that has grown steadily in recent years. Lines (1991a) estimated the figure between 200,000 and 300,000 families while others have placed the number as high as one million (Ray, 1988). Given the reluctance of some parents to inform their local school district that they are home schooling, many believe that these numbers are conservative at best. Although there may be variances in the rate of home school growth or the precise number of home schooled children, the fact that the number of home schools is increasing is not in dispute (Lines, 1987). In Connecticut, during the 1993-94 school year, State Department of Education officials were aware of 1,113 home schooled students, a 30% increase in the

number of home school students from the previous school year and a 1,384% student increase since 1983 (Connecticut State Department of Education, 1993).

In this paper, home instruction, home schooling, and home education are used interchangeably.

Background of Home Instruction in Connecticut

In 1982-83, the Connecticut Commissioner of Education issued a Circular Letter which provided procedures to be utilized by local boards of education when parents chose to educate their children at home. Included in the procedures were the local boards of education's explicit obligation to approve the request for home instruction and to determine if the child was receiving equivalent instruction as required by Connecticut General Statute Section 10-220. Whether approval was granted or denied by the local board of education, a statement from the Superintendent of Schools was to be submitted to the Commissioner of Education indicating the process followed by the local board in making its determination (Connecticut Department of Education, 1982)

In 1989, The Connecticut State Board of Education declined to rule on a petition filed by an Avon Connecticut Superintendent of Schools for a declaratory ruling on the scope of the oversight responsibilities of local school districts with regard to home instruction. Because of that action, the Commissioner of Education created a Home Instruction Study Committee comprised of representatives from local school districts and parents who home instructed. From that Home Instruction Study Committee, a new

policy and suggested procedures were born. Under the new policy, local Boards of Education were no longer responsible for approving the home school program. They simply had to acknowledge receipt of a parent's notice of intent to home school form, which provided basic information about the program to be provided for their child. An annual portfolio review between the school district officials and the parent to determine if instruction in the required courses had been given was also added to the procedures (Connecticut Department of Education, 1990).

In 1994, a revised home instruction policy and procedures were adopted. It followed the 1990 procedures except that school districts no longer had to provide the State Department of Education with a copy of the notice of intent form (Connecticut Department of Education, 1994).

Statement of the Problem

It is clear that the State of Connecticut has the statutory authority and responsibility to ensure an educated citizenry and that the state board of education has set expectations and goals for the students in Connecticut. Since the mid 1980s, mastery testing for students in fourth, sixth, and eighth grades, Connecticut Authentic Performance Test(CAPT)for students in tenth grade, strategic school profiles, Continuing Education Units (CEUs) requirement for professional school district personnel, proficiency testing for prospective teachers, and stricter requirements for teacher certification have been instituted to ensure accountability to the public that Connecticut schools are

meeting their prescribed mission. While the public schools have experienced more accountability in terms of mandates from the state, home instruction policy and procedures have been relaxed. The state has an obligation to the general public and especially to the 1,113 home schooling children to respond to these questions: Are home school students receiving equivalent instruction? What is the relationship with their local school districts? How do the local school districts determine equivalent instruction?

In spite of the growing research on home schooling nationwide, there is only one research study on home instruction in Connecticut (Fegley, 1993). Limited research exists involving direct observation of home schools in the United States (Knowles, 1991; Reynolds, 1985; Taylor, 1993) and Fegley's study in Connecticut does not include direct observations of parents teaching their children at home. His research also did not involve any participation from Connecticut school officials. Considering the growing number of families in Connecticut who have chosen home instruction for their children, the increased accountability for public education, and research that shows that 75% of home schooling children return to public schools (Williams, 1984), it would seem that the state has an obligation to study this population. The 1990 Connecticut Home Study Committee concluded their report by stating "it would be worthwhile for the same committee to reconvene in a year or

two to reexamine the success of any implemented recommendation" (Connecticut Department of Education, 1990, p. 9). This has not been done.

The purpose of this study, conducted in the natural environment of the home school, was to examine home schooling in Connecticut by producing a series of case studies describing the motivations, methods of instruction, monitoring of achievement, and socialization efforts of four home school families, and their relationships with the public schools. It also provided data for consideration by the public schools to accommodate the needs of those families who might otherwise opt for home education. This study examined the present policy on home schooling, the success of the 1990 policy and procedures and provided suggestions for future policies on home schooling, thus assisting the state in achievement of its mission.

Characteristics of Home Schoolers

Brian Ray (1990) found in his research that home schoolers included atheists, Christians, and Mormons; conservatives, libertarians, and liberals; low, middle and high income families, Black, White and Oriental people, parents with Ph.D.'s, parents with bachelor's degrees, and parents with no degrees; and families containing one, five, and 10 children. He summarized that in many ways home school families were part of mainstream America. John Fegley's 1993 research about Connecticut home schooling families found that they were larger than the average Connecticut family, coming from traditional two-parent homes with

traditional values. The mother was the primary instructor for subjects, and the father played an active but supplementary role in the direct education of the children. About one half of home schooling parents had a college degree, as compared to about one fourth of the adult population. Home schooling mothers in Connecticut were slightly better educated than the home schooling mothers nationwide. Home schooling families in Connecticut generally had a higher income than families nationwide. Most of the home schooling families in Connecticut practiced a Christian faith more closely mirroring the general Christian population of the country than was found in the nationwide study of home schooling three years earlier (Ray, 1990).

Reasons and Decisions to Home School

Parents generally first learned about home schooling incidently through people, events, or the media. The decision to withdraw children from school was often made quickly, but the parents often reported that they had already exhausted their other alternatives (Van Galen, 1988).

Families reported that home schooling provided a better learning environment than traditional schools and that they home schooled because of dissatisfaction with those schools (Bliss, 1989; Divorky, 1983; Knoph, 1988; Mayberry, 1988; Wartes, 1988; Williams, 1990).

Jane Van Galen (1986) divided the home schooling families into two categories which she called the Idealogues and the Pedagogues. The Idealogues objected to what they believed was

being taught in public and private schools, and they sought to strengthen their relationships with their children. The Pedagogues taught their children at home primarily for pedagogical reasons. They shared a respect that for their children's intellect and creativity and a belief that children learned best when pedagogy tapped into a child's innate desire to learn.

Parents in Connecticut cited the following reasons for home schooling: religious convictions (23%); dissatisfaction with the public schools (9%); better learning (8%); dissatisfaction with the curriculum (3%); protection from negative influences (3%); and philosophy (2%). A combination of the above reasons in addition to family unity and relationships was cited by 44% of the parents. Some families (9%) cited health, self-esteem, rights of children, self-responsibility, and a time to pursue music (Fegley, 1993).

Description of the Home School: Curriculum and Instruction

Many parents new to home schooling learned about teaching, school materials, scheduling of their day, and what they should teach their children through their affiliations with other home schoolers (Van Galen, 1986). Van Galen also found that most home school parents employed traditional teaching methods and materials and fall short of the creative and spontaneous models

of learning offered by the movement's leadership (Holt, 1981; Moore & Moore, 1984). She found that home schooling, especially in the first months and years, and traditional schooling were very similar.

J. Gary Knowles (1988) found that most home school parents taught much like they were taught and used the same approaches they criticized in formal schools. He found little variety in teaching methods, with few parents being able to facilitate learning beyond competitive and conventional approaches, particularly those associated with workbook type activities.

Fegley (1993) found that many home school families in Connecticut learned about materials from other home schoolers through support groups and state and national publications. Many home school families used a published curriculum package when they first began to home school but gradually supplemented their curricula with a variety of sources. Over half of the families used a computer as part of their educational program.

Home school families in Fegley's study considered themselves to have a structured program, following a schedule or daily routine without being rigid. The delivery of the course material was flexible depending upon the interests and ages of the children. Field trips and educational experiences outside the home were an integral part of every home schooling family.

Academic Outcomes of Home Schooling

Opponents of the home school movement often cite concerns of minimal academic progress and lack of healthy socialization for

these home schooled children. There are numerous studies which show that home school children perform as well or better than their traditional school counterparts (Delahooke, 1986; Frost and Morris, 1988; Greene, 1984; Linden 1983; Rakestraw, 1987; 1988; Ray; 1990; Wartes; 1989).

Affective Outcomes of Home Schooling

Socializing is the dimension most frequently mentioned in discussions or debates concerning home schooling (Ray & Wartes, 1991). The existing research indicates that the self concept of students who are home schooled is higher than conventional schooled children (Kelley, 1992; Shyers, 1992; Taylor, 1986), that they are actively involved in community activities (Delahooke, 1986; Wartes, 1987), not isolated from social and group activities (Montgomery, 1989; Rakestraw, 1987) and are socially competent as adults (Webb, 1989). With few exceptions, (Chatham, 1991; Delahooke, 1986) the data indicate that the socialization skills of home school children are appropriate.

Relationship between Public Schools and Home Educators

Although changes in school board policy and legislation have encouraged cooperation, often as a result of the considerable legislative lobbying efforts of parents (Lines, 1985; Wartes, 1988), most school district personnel are negative in their perceptions of home schooling (Mahan and Ware, 1987; McGraw, 1989; Rose, 1985). School officials desire stringent regulations of home school families (DeRoche, 1993; O'Laughlin, 1993) thus restricting parents in the control of their children's education.

Fegley (1993) reported that four-fifths of the Connecticut parents did not have any relationship with the public schools to use material or facilities, or to request assistance.

Portfolio Assessment

The most commonly employed assessments used to evaluate the appropriateness of home based education have consisted primarily of large scale, standardized, multiple choice assessments. Wartes (1988) found little or no relationship between educational opportunities and parent education level, contact with a certified teacher, level of structure in the curriculum, hours of formal schooling, grade level, and parent income. He suggested that the current practice by which home schooling is judged does not offer an appropriate framework. He recommended to policy makers that attempts to judge home schools be outcome based.

Parental Involvement and School Choice

The Carnegie's Governor's Report on Education (1986) recommended parental involvement and school choice as two critical components for improved student achievement and educational improvement. Home schooling, by design, represents those two areas.

Summary

Home schooling, as a form of school choice, has grown in the past decade. Educators, parents, and policy makers are grappling with the tension to balance parents' and states' rights in the education of children. School officials are concerned about their obligation to ensure that home school students are receiving equivalent instruction. As the home schooling movement

has grown in strength and in numbers, researchers have responded to the concerns of parents and school district personnel by studying this population. This study will provide additional research about home education.

The Research Questions

Given the need to examine home schooling from the families and school systems' perspectives, the following research questions were investigated. How and why did parents decide to home school their children? What structure, curriculum and methodologies are employed? How are learning and achievement monitored? What socialization opportunities are provided? What is the relationship between home school families and their local school districts? How do school officials who monitor home instruction perceive home schooling? How do these school officials and parents view the use of a portfolio assessment as a way of measuring the academic success of the home school student? and What, if any, would be the reasons home school families would send or return their children to private or public school?

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

To address the research questions, it was essential that this study was conducted in the context, setting, and from the reference of the home school population. This research design was drawn from the qualitative and naturalistic research paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To discover, understand, and gain insight from the perspective of the home schooling situation, a case study approach was used (Merriam, 1988). Yin (1984) said

that the case study approach is preferred in examining contemporary events. The case study relies on additional evidence not usually observed by the researcher--direct observation and systematic interviewing. It is an intense, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit (Merriam, 1988).

Data collection strategies included: semi-structured and open-ended interviews with families and school district officials, direct observations of the home school, and document analysis. Data were gathered during an eight month period from March to October of 1994 with the researcher spending approximately 40 hours in the homes of families who home school; 36 hours encompassing direct observations of home schooling. Two interviews were conducted with each home school family. Documents such as schedules, curricula, and teaching materials used by the families were analyzed. Five hours were spent conducting interviews with school district officials. Additional time was spent conducting a pilot study with a home school family and a school official. The researcher also had an opportunity to attend and participate at a two day neighboring state convention of approximately 2,000 home schoolers and was an observer at a Connecticut statewide support group meeting of The Education Association of Christian Homeschoolers (T.E.A.C.H.) and at a regional support group meeting of the Connecticut Home Education Association (C.H.E.A.). The researcher also subscribed to and read six national home schooling publications; The Teaching Home,

Home Education Magazine, Growing Without Schooling, Home School Legal Defense Association Publication, Home School Researcher, and Nathan, a publication for home school families with special needs children. Publications from the two statewide homeschooling associations, Teach Digest and Hearth Notes were read.

Selection of Participants

Cheryl Wright (1988) in her critique of the research on home schooling cited the difficulty in gaining access to the private domain of the home school family. Many researchers have used families previously known to them or their own family in their case studies. She emphasized the importance of impartiality to establish credibility and validity in the research findings. For that reason, this study involved four home school families in Connecticut, not previously known to the researcher.

The participants were selected by using four volunteer families who had participated in home schooling for at least one year. Stratified purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) was used to gain an understanding of home school families from different beliefs and perspectives. Two families from each of the state home school organizations--The Education Association of Christian Homeschoolers (T.E.A.C.H.) and the Connecticut Home Education Association (C.H.E.A.) were chosen. T.E.A.C.H.'s focus is from a Christian perspective as indicated in their Statement of Faith, "Our Statement of Faith includes only those truths upon which all true Christians agree . . . Children are a gift of God to their

parents, whose responsibility it is to train them in a manner pleasing to him, not only spiritually but academically as well" (1995, p.2). C.H.E.A.'s statement of purpose states that "it is open to any person regardless of race, color, creed or religious affiliation" (1995, p.3).

No two families were selected from the same public school system. Children ranged in grades from preschool through high school. Some of the children were identified students with disabilities. Additionally, the district school superintendent and a second official from the local school district were interviewed. The officials included an elementary and a secondary school principal, an assistant superintendent, and a director of special services.

Gaining Access

Julie Webb (1989) in her study of British Home Schools discussed the issue of direct observation of home schools and cited the difficulty in getting families to participate. Recognizing the potential difficulty of access, the researcher prepared an entree plan which included the use of key informants. After identifying one family who had home schooled their children since 1982, the researcher was able to gain access to the leaders of the two homeschooling organizations in the state. After much discussion, the leaders of the home schooling organizations provided five potential participants. After contacting each family, establishing rapport, and guaranteeing anonymity to the participants, an interview, observations of the home school, and

a follow up interview were conducted. One family declined to be a participant but was willing to offer names of other potential participants.

Data Collection

This study employed three data collection techniques: interviewing, nonparticipant observation and document analysis. A pilot study for testing and refining the interview format and observation practice were conducted using a home school family and school official not included in this study. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed to obtain accuracy for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). A qualitative data management program, The Ethnograph (1988), was used to identify, code, and cluster behaviors into categories and themes based on the interviews, observations and document analysis. The constant comparative method of data analysis was used. Once categories were formed, events were organized around these areas (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). An audit trail consisting of field notes, reflexive journal, observations, interviews, and document reviews were coded, analyzed, and synthesized for patterns and emergent themes. As patterns emerged, the researcher tested the themes against the gathered data and sought for alternative explanations of the themes (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the term that qualitative researchers use when addressing the reliability and validity of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish credibility (truth value or internal validity) persistent observation, prolonged engagement, and triangulation were employed by obtaining data from interviews with parents and school officials; observing in the natural setting of four home school settings; and analyzing documents from the home schools.

A peer debriefer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to strengthen the credibility of the study by acting as a "devil's advocate". Transferability (generalizability or external validity) was a limitation because of the limited number of participants; however, multiple cases, multiple informants, and more than one data gathering technique strengthened this study's usefulness to other settings.

FINDINGS

Introduction

This section is divided into seven parts. First, a brief description of the four case studies is provided. The next six sections discuss the results of each research question.

Family One: Home Schooling Underground

Family One had been home schooling for eight years. They had two boys ages 10 and 12, fifth and seventh graders. They were active members of the support group T.E.A.C.H. and were Christians. Mom had a four year college degree; dad had a high school diploma and had taken some college courses. The family

was not registered with their local school district as they made the decision not to file an intent to home schooling form since they moved to this community four years ago. They used their entire house to home school--utilizing the living room, kitchen and bedrooms for formal instruction and the basement for working with dad on woodworking projects. The children utilized the outdoors for recess and for projects in science.

Family Two: The Neophyte Home Schoolers

Family Two had been home schooling for two years. Both parents had college degrees. Before mom had children, she worked as a speech clinician in a neighboring public school system. They were members of T.E.A.C.H. and were Christians. They had four children--three boys, ages six, four, and 18 months, and a girl, age three. They were expecting their fifth child in four months. She presently schooled the two boys, who were in first grade and nursery school, although the others often joined in during the lessons. The boy in first grade followed a structured schedule, and the boy in nursery school had a more flexible schedule. They used their kitchen and living room primarily for home schooling although they felt that schooling and learning was a 24 hour experience.

Family Three: Home Schooling Students with Disabilities

Family Three had been home schooling for 13 years. The family belonged to the support group C.H.E.A. and have been very active throughout the years. They were Mormons. They homeschooled eight of their children until two years ago and presently were homeschooling six boys from different families. The boys ranged

in ages from 12 years to 16 years and were in grades sixth through third year of high school. Five out of the six boys were identified as special education students by their local school system and received special education services when they were in the public school. Mom and dad both graduated from high school; dad was finishing his first year of college. Their present day home school utilized the kitchen, living room, porch, and outside environment consisting of their immediate yard and beyond.

Family Four: Creative and Flexible Home School

This family had been home schooling for nine years. The family belonged to the support group C.H.E.A. and had been active at the local and state level. They presently homeschooled three boys, ages 12, 10 and eight. Their oldest boy was preparing to enter high school next year. They also homeschooled their daughter until she was 14. She was presently in her senior year at the local public high school. The family utilized the kitchen, dining room, bedrooms and den for instruction. Mom had an elementary teaching certificate and has taught in the public school prior to having a family. Dad was presently a public high school teacher.

Finding Out About Home Schooling

Variety of Sources

One question investigated in this study explored ways parents find out about home schooling. The four families in this study first learned about home schooling from a variety of sources--through Christian radio, a legal organization, and from

other families who had home schooled their children. The families learned about home schooling incidently, and considered home education only after hearing it from others.

Researched Home Schooling

All families researched the home schooling concept by reading publications on home schooling, and having discussions with other home school families. Two families in this study also discussed home schooling with their children, as they were part of the decision making. Families in this study explored their options prior to implementing their home school program. This finding suggests that families decided to home school their children after careful and thoughtful deliberations.

Deciding to Home School

A Better Learning Environment

A question in this study examined the reasons parents decided to home school. Common themes emerged in all four cases. Families in this study believed that home schooling provided a better learning environment than public or private school. In this study, one family decided to home school long before their children were to formally begin school. One father commented:

> Raymond Moore (1979) talked about . . . the fact that children for instance don't all learn to walk at the same age, and how is it that we still feel they ought to read at the same age. He felt there ought to be more flexibility with the child in the early stages--more their own pace so--that was the first reason that we decided to do it. (IT.HU.D.3.24.1)

"Our vantage point was that home schooling is the number one opportunity, even better than Christian school" (IT.HU.D.3.24.12).

Two families decided to home school as a result of their dissatisfaction with traditional public and private schools. One family chose home schooling as an alternative to Christian education.

A Quality Education

Whatever reasons parents cited for choosing home schooling, all believed it gave their children a better education than public or private school. These parents made a rationale decision that home schooling was the best alternative for them. To these parents, the commitment of time and energy, the expense to home school, and the negative reactions from family members and the public were worth the benefits of assuming control of the education of their children. This finding suggests that home school families are serious about the quality of their children's education and believe that home schooling gives their children the best possible education.

Strengthening Family Unity and Christian Values

All families believed that home schooling strengthened their family unity and allowed for much flexibility and creativity in their daily life. One father explained:

> It's not really like, nine o'clock you start school and three o'clock you end. It's not a structured thing . . . you get flexibility. . . if mom has to run an errand . . . she can do that, juggle her schedule and by the same token, if I'm home in the evening . . . and I see an application for a math or even teaching some general skills in woodworking--I will call them down . . . that's what we consider home schooling too. (IT.HU.D.3.24.8)

Families who utilized a Christian curriculum also stated that home schooling enabled them to integrate their Christian values

in their children's studies. These families did not initially choose home schooling for religious reasons. While they believed that their religious convictions were important to their family, to them home schooling was the best educational alternative for their children.

Structure of the Home School

Professional Development and Mentoring

Another question addressed how home school are conducted, and what methodologies and type of curriculum are used. This study also explored how parents monitor their children's learning and achievement.

All parents learned about teaching methods and curriculum from other home schoolers and home schooling magazines. Home school families were instrumental in assisting new families in the design of their home schools. Most families started home schooling with a structured curriculum. That structured curriculum was altered as families became more comfortable with home schooling, not unlike what happens in traditional school settings. One mother explained:

> I had little ones climbing all over the table and I thought, no this can't work . . . but it got easier as it went along even the little girl [age three] . . . gets out her little coloring book [and says] Can I do my home school today? (IT.NH.M.4.21.3)

Home school families acted as mentors to families new to home schooling, assisting them in teaching methodologies and curriculum options. Through this mentoring, home school families developed techniques to assist with their children's learning and achievement.

Seeking out Resources

Families also searched for resources to use in their home schools. One mom stated:

> What they [home school families] will do to find a music lesson, chemistry, or whatever is needed. If you were in the school system, you sit back and you rely more on that system to do it--I realize as we're out of the school system we have many more opportunities. (IT.CF.M.10.11.6)

They explored the community, attending tag and library sales for materials. They also utilized local civic and community service agencies for extra-curricular activities. This finding suggests that these creative parents are experts at finding resources for their children using a limited budget to achieve optimal success.

Flexibility and the Teachable Moment

The home school schedules basically followed the traditional school calendar, but education emerged in their everyday activities as families sought to capitalize on the "teachable moment." One dad commented:

> We do teaching here in the formal sessions with the lessons . . . and then we take a lot of opportunity to teach the kids . . . wherever . . . the street, as we're driving or going for a walk or watching Discovery . . . we foster that inquisitive nature . . . we call it a teachable moment. (IT.NH.D.4.21.14)

The school day consisted of four to five hours a day. Most families home schooled approximately 180 days but also continued with learning activities, such as reading, computer assisted instruction, and journal writing throughout the summer.

Home schooling and life activities were intertwined. Having specific yearly goals that the families wanted to accomplish, they were flexible on a day to day basis--changing their schedule as it met the demands of the family.

School and Life Intertwined

Mom was the primary teacher although the father also played a vital role in home schooling as a supporter, reinforcer, and teacher of some subjects. Children worked on their lessons as mom cooked, did laundry and met the needs of the other children in the family. During an observation, as two boys were working at the kitchen table, their younger sister came out of the bathroom with her tights down to her knees and announced that she needed mommy to "wipe my hiney" (FN.NH.5.5.2).

All families expressed that the family unit was the number one priority to them. One mom explained "they [the children] like being with the family . . . it's strange in this day and age [to have] a 14 year old boy who wants to go to the movies with me . . . they want to do things as a family" (IT.CF.M.10.11.5).

Curriculum and Instruction

Free to explore a variety of teaching methods. Families employed variety in their teaching methods, utilizing hands on activities, projects, and participated in field trips with other home school families. Individualized and group lessons were also employed. All families taught group lessons with children who were on different grade levels and utilized integrated learning activities. The findings suggest that home schooling parents are becoming more creative in their teaching methods. It appears

that as litigation worries decreased, and home school policies loosened, these families, without fear of government involvement, have become liberated to explore the realm of curriculum and teaching. Children also engaged in educational activities long before they reached the legal school age.

Christian materials to eclectic publications. Families represented two different groups in Connecticut. Families from the Christian Support Group T.E.A.C.H. used Christian based textbooks and materials, and the Bible as a major part of their curriculum offerings. Prayer was vital to these home school families. The families from the non-denominational support group C.H.E.A. used materials from their local school districts and published materials as part of their curriculum offerings.

Resources--computer, library and field trips. Three out of the four families used a computer as part of their educational program. The public library was a vital resource to these home school families. Field trips and activities with other home school families were an integral part of the home school.

Typical kids. Children acted like typical school children as they were being instructed. They laughed, made faces at one another, were inattentive, asked when the lessons would be over, asked to go outside to play and made statements that reflected dissatisfaction with certain academic tasks.

Personalized style. While there was a basic framework in the design of the home schools in this study, they also varied in the structure, plan and curriculum offerings depending upon the individual families' beliefs, lifestyle and goals for their

children. This is not unlike traditional school settings as classroom climate differs depending upon the personality and beliefs of the individual teacher.

There was evidence from direct observations of the home schools that what parents reported during the interviews were being accomplished. The findings of this study suggest that families operate their home schools as they say they do. The findings also suggest that there are many similarities between home schools and traditional school settings in their design and structure. It also suggests that children who are home schooled act similar to children who attend traditional schools.

A Legitimate Option

The conventional design of home schools with families teaching their own children may be changing; as in this study, one family home schooled other children and operated the home school like a small private school. Parents of traditional school children sought out this home school family as they were looking for an alternative educational setting for their children. Mom explained:

> He was in the ninth grade and hadn't gone to school for three weeks knowing he wasn't going to pass. His mother wanted me to take him until the end of the year. His mother said she's been through PPT's (Planning and Placement Team Meetings)--she's been through everything and nothing was working.(IT.DI.M.6.7.7)

The local school district was aware of this situation, supporting this family with resources such as textbooks and the

use of the school library. This finding suggests that home schooling has become a legitimate educational option for a variety of children and families today.

Monitoring of Learning

Record Keeping and Observation

Parents determined goals for their children on a yearly and daily basis. Parents kept a daily record of what was accomplished in the home school. Monitoring of learning and achievement was utilized by observing children as they worked. Parents also used questioning techniques to determine educational progress. Children participated in parent made, publisher, and standardized tests. Parents also used performance based assessment such as journal writing, culminating projects and verbal demonstrations to determine educational progress. All families in this study reported high expectations for their children's performance.

Students' work samples, projects, parents' daily record keeping, and direct observations of the interactions between parents and children were evidence to this researcher that the children in this study were achieving.

Assessing Without Mandate

Parents constantly and effectively monitored their children's educational achievement. Even the one family, who home schooled

without the knowledge of the local school district, kept a record of children's progress and had the children participate in standardized testing. Dad explained:

> It's usually no surprises either--if they're doing well in a subject you know about it--ahead of time, and it confirms it. And also if we know there's a weakness--like one year our son with his math . . . completed a lot fewer than he really should, because we knew he had a problem with being distracted and that showed in the test too, nothing new to us but it's there in black and white. (IT.HU.D.3.24.10)

Without a government mandate, this family assessed the learning of their children. This finding suggests that home school families are serious about the educational performance of their children and, without a mandate to do so, continually assess their children's achievement; using a variety of methods found in schools today.

No Grades for Non-denominational Home School Families

Families who utilized a Christian curriculum in their home school incorporated grades and testing, similar to what happens in traditional school settings. The non-denominational families expressed a belief that grades and testing were unnecessary and did not utilize them in the home school. One mom stated: "I think we over test to begin with" (IT.CF.M.10.11.3). "You have a pre-conceived idea of where that child is" (IT.CF.M.9.29.8). Math papers are scored - but there "aren't grades per se--it's mostly verbal feedback" (IT.CF.M.10.11.2). She explained:

> I'll put some math examples on the white board and while I'm making oatmeal, I'm watching him do each one Why would I have to sit down and give him a test? It would be stupid unless he's going to school and needs to be aware of that skill. (IT.CF.M.10.11.3)

This finding suggests that families who are non-denominational in their approach to home schooling differ more in their philosophy of education than parents who choose traditional schools for their children. Families who use Christian materials in their home schools share a similar philosophy with traditional schools concerning the use of standardized tests and grades.

The Support Group

Informed and armed. Home school families were active members of a home school support group. From this involvement, families learned about local, state and national laws as they related to the family and home schooling. They were well read about their constitutional rights as it pertained to instructing their children at home and were prepared to fight any attempts to erode those rights. Home school families also were well read about current educational practices and curricula offerings. They subscribed to current home schooling publications and attended local and state conferences on home schooling. They also participated in many activities with other home school families, such as clubs, fairs and foreign language instruction, to enhance the academic achievement of their children. One mom commented: "If there's a particular need you will find it out in the community--you will locate it--I'm amazed at the resources and the networking that is done within the home schooling community" (IT.CF.M.10.11.5). This finding suggests that the home school support group has become a basis for professional development activities for home school families.

Socialization Activities

Responding to the Critics

This study examined the extent in which parents provide socialization opportunities for their children to interact with age appropriate peers. The families in this study recognized that most home school critics cited socialization as a negative aspect of home schooling. These families were prepared to respond to the critics' claims that home school children are isolated. These families believed that adults played a more important role in the development of appropriate socialization skills for children as opposed to their age appropriate peers.

Various Social Opportunities

Families cited many activities in which their children socialized with others. They did not deliberately plan those activities to overcome the critic's anti-socialization aspect of home schooling. Parents discussed:

> Raymond Moore touches on that [socialization] very directly--refers to a lot of other research--that children are socialized best by adults. What is socialization? . . . what socialization will take place between a child in a room with 20 or 30 other children in the same age group? They're just automatically going to share? And be kind? That doesn't typically happen. (IT.HU.M.D.3.24.11)

These activities were a natural part of their life. The home school children in this study were not isolated. Children played with other home schoolers, family and neighborhood friends, and participated in church group activities as well as home school support group activities. Children also participated in local civic activities, such as plays and sports activities.

Communicated with Researcher

Children readily communicated with the researcher. They were friendly, often presenting samples of their work to the researcher. In addition, they interacted with their siblings and other home school students on academic tasks and projects.

This study suggests that home school families do not deliberately plan socialization opportunities for their children as a result of being home schooled. Their children participated in many activities outside the home school with age appropriate peers. Socialization activities were a natural ingredient to family life. Children were not isolated from contact with other children.

Relationship with Local School Districts and Public School Participation

Difference in Perception of Public Schools

Two research questions examined home school families' relationship with their local school district and their perceptions of the public schools. Families who primarily utilized a Christian curriculum in their home schools and families who utilized secular materials differed in their perceptions of the local public school system.

T.E.A.C.H.--against Christian values. Families who utilized Christian materials were skeptical of the local school system and its personnel, believing that the public school system's values differed dramatically from their own Christian values. They planned to home school through high school. The families believed that public schools taught concepts that were an

anathema to Christianity. One father explained: "The sex ed program they are teaching now--it's sex aside from morals . . . nothing in there about abstinence" (IT.NH.D.4.21.10). "When we were growing up there . . . a moment of silence . . . and respect for Christian values . . . as best I can tell there's almost an attack against Christianity or anti Christian beliefs" (IT.NH.D.4.21.10). These parents had a general feeling of distrust for the educational hierarchy and cited the major teacher organizations as having an agenda that was contrary to home schoolers' agenda. Families who utilized a Christian curriculum were skeptical of the curriculum that was being taught in the public school and believed that educational bureaucrats see home schooling as a threat to public education. They also questioned the work that the public school system was doing in educating its own students. One family was concerned about the safety of the public schools for their children.

More Families and Changing Attitudes

One family chose not to file an intent to home school form and was not known to their local school district. This finding suggests that the number of home school families in Connecticut may be larger than what has been reported to the State Department of Education. This family also believed that local public schools should not monitor their home school. The other family was looking forward to a positive relationship with their local school district but was concerned that the school district might not encourage such a relationship. Mom stated: "I would love for them to be supportive . . . giving me goals and objectives

for each grade . . . just guidance to make sure I'm going along where I should be" (IT.NH.M.4.21.8). The findings in this study suggest that new home school families who utilize Christian materials may be more receptive in establishing partnerships with their local public school system than families who have home schooled prior to 1990 when Connecticut policy and procedures were more prescriptive. It appears that the relaxing of the procedures have encouraged a more conciliatory relationship with the local public school system.

Litigation Concerns

Both families from T.E.A.C.H. were concerned about future litigious activity and joined the Home School Legal Defense Association for protection; should any legal action be taken against them for home schooling. They both stated that public schools would never be an option for their children.

C.H.E.A.--Sought School Resources

Families who did not primarily use religious materials in their home schools cited positive relationships with their local building level administrators and teachers and a non-existent relationship with their superintendent. Both families have sent their children to the public schools after being home schooled and one family's child participated in public school and home school jointly and cited that arrangement as a positive experience. One family utilized the public school as a resource; using school materials and consulting with staff. One family was planning to send their children to public school when they enter high school.

School Officials' Perceptions

Religion, Values, and Better Academic Environment

Another question explored how school officials who monitor home instruction of these four families perceive home schooling. Religion, negative aspects of public education, and parent's feelings that home schooling provided a better academic environment were the areas cited as reasons parents home school.

Academic and Socialization Issues

Some achievement to equal or better. Two out of the eight administrators who were interviewed, both of whom were principals, believed that home schooling could provide an academic environment equal or better than the public schools. Three central office administrators acknowledged that some home school students make academic progress.

Socialization concerns. Seven out of eight administrators expressed concerns about the socialization of home school students. They believed that students who are home schooled lacked appropriate socialization skills. They expressed apprehension that home school students are isolated from peers and do not have the necessary social skills to exist in society. One superintendent commented that home school children "suffer" (IT.S4.SU.7.26.1) and that the parents could not provide a suitable educational experience for their children. He stated: "I think they shortchange their kids . . . they have less people skills . . . they really end up isolating themselves" (IT.S4.SU.7.26.2).

Troubled About Home Schooling Students with Disabilities

Seven out of eight administrators expressed more concern about home schooling students with disabilities as compared with typical home school students. They believed that most parents do not have the necessary skills for teaching students with disabilities and that it would be difficult for the home school parent to offer an array of services. They also expressed apprehension about the isolation of home schooling the student with disabilities. One superintendent commented, "And having mom teach at home, who is not a certified teacher, I shudder to think of what's going to happen to this poor youngster" (IT.S1.SU.9.19.3). This finding suggests that without direct knowledge of students with disabilities who have been home schooled, administrators perceive that home schooling cannot work for this population.

Relationship with Home School Families

No relationship equates to a positive one. All administrators characterized their relationship with home school families as positive even though most did not have direct involvement with home school families. Central office administrators stated that they wished families would not home school and that families were doing a disservice to their children. This study suggests that administrators equate a "hands off policy" as having a positive relationship with home school families.

Litigious concerns. Three central office administrators cited concerns of future litigious activity against the state and local board of education because of the present home schooling policy

in Connecticut. They felt that because of the weak policy school district personnel could not monitor the achievement of home school students effectively. A central office administrator commented: "Will a home school student come to the state . . . and say he wasn't educated and the state usurped its responsibility? Can society afford illiterate people" (IT.S2.DS.8.15.5)?

Disagreement over dual enrollment. Central office administrators stated disagreement with dual enrollment provisions for the home school student. They said that dual enrollment would cause a disruption in the schools and would be too difficult to implement. The two school principals were opened to offering dual enrollment but expressed concern that their superintendent and local board of education would not be in favor of it. This finding suggests that the further an administrator is from the classroom, the less creative and flexible one is, concentrating on "what if" scenarios rather than "what could be."

Principals more supportive--seeing is believing. These findings suggest that principals are more supportive of home schooling than central office administrators. It also suggests that administrators who have had direct contact with home school families are more receptive of home schooling as providing a suitable educational environment for students. Utilizing portfolio assessment, home school families have demonstrated to these administrators evidence of learning and achievement in the home schools. These principals also had an opportunity to

observe home school students entering the public school after being home schooled. Principals acknowledged that these children were successful in the pubic schools and that there was evidence that they achieved while being home schooled. As one principal commented, "Recently, we we've had a couple of homeschoolers come back to us . . . and they did well on the Connecticut Mastery Test last year" (IT.S3.EP.8.24.1). "After meeting homeschool families my beliefs have changed . . . the last few years I have not been so . . . defensive about people who do it" (IT.S3.EP.8.24.4).

Portfolio Assessment and Present Policy on Home Schooling Not a Sufficient Measure

This study probed school officials' and parents' views of the use of a portfolio assessment as a way of measuring the achievement of the home school student. It also investigated the perceptions of the current home instruction policy in Connecticut. Seven out of eight administrators stated that they liked the idea of portfolio assessment for the home school student but felt that it was not a sufficient measure of student achievement. One superintendent commented, "Portfolios are as good as the honesty of the people involved in presenting them" (IT.S3.SU.8.11.2). School officials would like to see the home school student participate in standardized testing. The high school principal believed that portfolio assessment was a sufficient measure of student achievement but would like to see an explanation accompany the portfolio. The findings from this study suggest that most school district administrators perceive

standardized testing as a valid measurement of student achievement for both the student who is schooled at home and the conventional school student. They are uncomfortable with alternative assessment procedures and rely on conventional testing for determining educational progress.

Not Consistent in Monitoring

One school district did not conduct a portfolio assessment with home school families and the other district was inconsistent in conducting an annual portfolio assessment with the home school family. One superintendent explained, "There's no teeth to that . . . there's no power to do anything with it . . . Superintendents don't have enough time to go screw around with that stuff" (IT.S.S.7.26.3-5). The findings from this study suggest that Connecticut school district personnel are not consistent in conducting portfolio assessments with home school families. It also suggests that school officials perceive home school children as step-children, not worthy of their time and effort.

Dislike Current Policy

Six out of eight administrators stated that they did not like the present policy on home schooling. They believed the policy was weak, favored the home school family and left the school district powerless in ensuring a suitable educational experience for the home schooled student. One superintendent commented that the state has "basically abdicated its responsibilities under the

pressure of home schoolers . . . buckled under" (IT.S4.SU.7.26.3). Central office administrators also expressed concerns about future litigation concerning the home schooled student.

Home School Families Like Portfolio Assessment

Three out of four home school families expressed satisfaction with the portfolio assessment as a way of measuring student achievement. One family questioned how the portfolio would be measured. They all expressed satisfaction with the current policy on home schooling and recognized that the state has a minimal role in home schooling.

Discussion and Implications

Finding Out About Home Schooling

As in Van Galen's study (1988), the four families in this study considered home education only after hearing it from others. This study found that, unlike Van Galen's research (1988), parents' decision to home school was made after serious and careful deliberation.

Deciding to Home School

Similar to the research by Divorky (1983), all families in this study believed that home schooling provided a better learning environment than public or private schools. This study supports the existing research that families chose home schooling for a better academic and social environment, because of dissatisfaction with traditional school and as an alternative to private education (Bliss, 1989; Fegley, 1993; Knoph, 1988; Mayberry, 1988; Wartes, 1988; Williams, 1990). Families in this

study also stated that home schooling enabled them to integrate their Christian values in their children's studies. All families believed that home schooling strengthened their family unity and allowed for much flexibility and creativity in their daily life. These attributes of home schooling support existing research by Gladin (1987) and Reynolds (1985).

Structure of the Home School

This study supports other research that home school families were instrumental in assisting new families in the design of their home schools (Fegley, 1993; Van Galen, 1986) and suggests that the home school support group has become a basis for professional development activities for home school families. The hours and design of the home schools in this study also supported the research of Fegley (1993) and Ray (1988).

Most families started home schooling with a structured curriculum. That structured curriculum was altered as families became more comfortable with home schooling, not unlike what happens in traditional school settings. Prior research by Van Galen (1986) and Fegley (1993) supports this finding. However, unlike Knowles (1988) and Van Galen's (1986) research, families in this study employed variety in their teaching methods, utilizing hands on activities, projects, and participated in field trips with other home school families.

Families represented two different groups in Connecticut. They were similar to the description of home school families given by Van Galen's (1986) research in which she describes home school families as Idealogues and Pedagogues. Idealogues

objected to what they believed was taught in public and private schools and sought to strengthen their relationships with their children. They utilized a Christian curriculum. The Pedagogues taught their children at home primarily for pedagogical reasons and utilized eclectic teaching materials.

This research also supports former studies concerning the design and curricula offerings of the home school (Fegley, 1993; Lines, 1991b; Ray, 1988) which found that the home schools were flexible and highly individualized, that Christian families used religious based materials and that home school groups assisted one another in the design and implementation of the home school.

Socialization

The descriptive data concerning socialization of home school students in this study corroborate existing research which described home school students' participation in many activities outside the home school; which suggested that home school students are not isolated socially (Delahooke, 1986; Rakestraw, 1987; and Wartes, 1987).

Relationship with Local School Districts

The findings from this study support Mayberry's (1988) Oregon study which found that home school parents had little confidence in public education and desired less federal and state government control of schools. The findings in this study also support research by Knowles (1989) and Lines (1985) which found that changes in policy and legislation have encouraged cooperation between home school families and their local school systems.

There is also evidence from this study that the number of home school families in Connecticut may be larger than reported.

School Officials' Perceptions

Superintendents and central office administrators were more critical than building principals that home schooling could not provide an appropriate academic or social environment. This supports the existing research (Mahan & Ware, 1987; McGraw, 1989; Rose, 1985) that public school personnel hold a negative view of home schooling. These findings suggest that principals are more supportive of home schooling than central office administrators and that administrators who have had direct contact with home school families are more receptive of home schooling as providing a suitable educational environment for students.

Most administrators stated that they did not like the present policy on home schooling characterizing it as weak. This finding supports the research of O'Laughlin (1993) and Deroche (1993) that superintendents believed there should be increased regulation of home school families.

Recommendations and Limitations

There is a disparity in what this research found and what superintendents and most school officials believe about home schooling. This is similar to the finding by Schmidt (1989) that most administrators do not believe the data on the academic and socialization benefits of home schooling.

In order for these myths to be dispelled, it is critical that current research on home schooling be presented to school administrators. Successful partnerships between home school

families and their school districts should be shared with other home school families and school district personnel. It is also important for families who utilize Christian materials to develop partnerships with their school districts. Successful partnerships could provide home schoolers and public schools with a true understanding and appreciation for each other. Partnerships could include conducting portfolio assessments with home school families, offering school resources such as materials, the school library, consultation with teachers, and part-time enrollment options. It is critical that both parties appreciate and understand that similar goals exist between the two groups. School district personnel need first-hand demonstrations that home schooling is one school choice option that is effective for children and families today.

Establishing partnerships with home school families will also benefit school districts. Most home school families are active participants in their cause to home school. They have joined support groups and have lobbied for their right to home school. These families could provide a voice and a vote in their support of local school budgets; if they believed that the schools assisted them in their desire to home school.

In the Third Wave, Alvin Toffler (1980) advocated that "Families should be encouraged to take a larger--not a smaller--role in the education of the young. Parents willing to teach their own children at home should be aided by the schools, not regarded a freaks or lawbreakers" (p. 386).

The Connecticut State Board of Education in its document Working Together for Student Achievement (1994) cited flexibility and creativity as areas that are vital if "we expect our students to succeed and excel." The Connecticut State Board of Education has a unique opportunity, in this age of school reform, to embrace home schooling partnerships which encourage flexibility and creativity. Those partnerships should be applauded not discouraged. What better way to monitor student achievement and provide opportunities for socialization with other children than to offer home school students an opportunity to participate in public school activities?

Home schooled students with disabilities should have the same opportunity afforded to them as private schooled students with disabilities. The school district should offer home school students with disabilities an equitable opportunity to access federal funds for special education services as is offered to private schooled students with disabilities under federal law. This would require a change in current Connecticut legislation which defines home schooling as home instruction and exempts a home schooling student from opting to access federal funds. The local school system would then be obligated to offer home school students a genuine opportunity for limited special education services. Home school parents would have a choice to accept or reject the school district's support. The change in legislation would also alleviate the fears of educators in this study who question home school as a viable option for the student with disabilities. Local school district personnel could assist

parents in the design of the child's individualized education program (IEP) and provide consultation to the family.

The Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) oversees athletic contests in member schools in grades 9 to 12. CIAC By-laws define pupil eligibility as one who is a member of a school and prohibit Connecticut home instructed students from participation in CIAC high school athletic activities. The CIAC eligibility committee should consider a revision of its policy to allow home school students an opportunity to participate in public schools' athletic activities. The state home schooling groups could assist CIAC in developing appropriate eligibility procedures for the home schooled student.

In concert with the current state and national trend to free cities and towns from government mandates and control, the Connecticut State Board of Education has stated that one of its goals is to eliminate or ease requirements that get in the way of student achievement. In this study, there was evidence that home schooled students were achieving. There was also evidence that parents were effectively monitoring their children's learning. Based on the findings of this study, the recommendation to policy makers and families is that the current state policy and procedures on home schooling should basically remain the same. However, the state should encourage school districts to establish partnerships that are creative and flexible with home school families and their children. A genuine partnership would involve shared decision making concerning portfolio design and how school districts could assist families with their home schooling

efforts. That assistance could include sharing materials, utilizing school resources, and participating in classes. Successful partnerships with home school families should be highlighted and exposed at state and local conferences on school reform. Home schooling organizations should also assist the state by presenting successful home-school district partnerships and highlighting those partnerships at their conferences.

Limitations

The opportunity to use multiple methods of data collections is a major strength of case study research (Merrian, 1988). Using volunteers can be a perceived weakness; however, in this study, the guarantee of anonymity allowed the participants to willingly cooperate with the researcher in uncovering "truths" about themselves. Another limitation was that the home school families in this study were active members of a home schooling group. Active families may have unique characteristics and may differ from home school families who are not involved with a local support group. The judgement of whether the study is applicable to another context is determined by the individual making the application.

Epilogue

Educational reform means change--change in what has been acceptable practice for years. It involves powerful establishments, such as federal and state departments of education, universities, school district administrative offices and teacher unions to relinquish and/or limit their authority on what is sanctioned schooling for students. A system of true

reform involves trust in local schools, parents, and students to be creative and flexible in choosing what works for them.

What is different from the norm is often subject to criticism and skepticism. We see this in the home schooling movement. This lifestyle choice makes a compelling statement that whittles away the traditional structure of education that has been in command for nearly a century. It is that profound act of dissention that has enabled this minority, as the home schooling community, to gather strength in their commitment to educate their children their way. The home schooling movement gives parents the freedom to make critical decisions on curriculum and instruction, which traditionally has been the responsibility of state departments, central office administrators and teachers. In a society that was founded on democratic principles, that encourage individuality and the freedom to differ, the concept of home schooling as a form of school choice should be embraced rather than mocked or discouraged. The one best system of education must end. It is inappropriate for the majority to dismiss these dissidents as fanatics or subculturists.

Holt (1983) stated that traditional schools may be able to learn from home schools. They contain, by design, many elements that are touted by school reformers as critical ingredients for the creation of lifelong learners. Reformers speak of graduating independent learners; yet most schools operate on a strict schedule with specific time increments for subject matter. Students are not free to explore areas of interest and are not active participants in their education. Contrary to that, home

schools are flexible in their schedule and structure. They permit students to explore areas of interest without concern for 45 minute classes. They allow for interdisciplinary study; and parents and students are active participants in school governance, developing their own goals and designing their own curriculum.

John Taylor Gatto (1992) in Dumbing Us Down wrote:

> Whatever an education is, it should make you a unique individual, not a conformist; it should furnish you with an original spirit with which to tackle big challenges; it should allow you to find values which is your road map through life; it should make you spiritually rich, a person who loves whatever you are doing, wherever you are, whomever you are with; it should teach you what is important, how to live and how to die. (p. 75)

This study has revealed that home school parents are serious about the education of their children. They have high expectations and are instilling in their children the desire to be lifelong learners.

Public schools are constantly striving for parental involvement and often cite the lack of that involvement as the number one reason why the public schools are failing to educate some children today. The Connecticut Board of Education in its document Working Together for Student Achievement (1994) stated that "parents and families must demonstrate daily that they care about each child's academic progress, homework, attendance, teacher comments and school activities." Home school families do this.

Public school personnel and other parents can learn from home school parents. To quote a superintendent in this study "We can't have children be the victims here. Of being used as pawns. Children are children, you do everything possible for them" (IT.S1.S.8.26.7). That will mean, setting aside differences and concentrating on similarities and allowing local public schools and home school families to be a resource to one another. That is a true partnership that can only enhance our children's education and our nation's future.

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